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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence and the relative salience of imagery and contextual cues in the mediation of preschoolers' emotional stereotypes. Fourteen male and 14 female preschoolers enrolled in a university summer preschool program were presented with six hypothetical emotional situations in story form -- 2 each for the emotions of anger, happiness, and fear. Each of the stories was augmented by one of two descriptive characteristics (i.e., imagery cues) of the central character. Thus, a character was described either as "with long, blond hair" (a female cue), or "with short, dark hair" (a male cue). For each subject, half of the situations contained female imagery cues and half contained male imagery cues (one male and one female cue per emotion). Subjects were then instructed to listen to each situation and decide if the character in the story was a boy or a girl. Following their gender attributions, subjects were asked to supply reasons for their gender choices. Using chi-square analysis, results provided further evidence for preschoolers' stereotyping of sex differences in emotionality. Results also confirm the finding that the salient feature of a particular situation may well override a young child's stereotypic beliefs about sex differences in individual aspects of emotionality. Further, results suggest that while imagery cues may indeed be used to mediate emotional stereotypes, their mere presence does not guarantee their use by the child, since their salience is also dependent upon situational and contextual cues. (Author/MP)

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Long-haired Girl, Short-Haired Boy: Imagery Use in Preschoolers' Stereotypes About Sex Differences in Emotionality

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This study derives from the finding in an earlier study (Chemelski & Birnbaum, 1979) that some preschoolers used imagery to mediate their stereotypes about sex differences in emotionality. In that study subjects were asked why they made a particular gender attribution in a given situation. Although none of the situations involved descriptions of the central character, several of the subjects indicated that they had used imagery to make their determinations (e.g., "Because she had long, blond hair."). Such imagery use also has been reported among college students (Cowan & Stewart, 1977). The present study was designed to further assess this use of imagery in preschoolers. The content of the previously reported imagery responses was used to design specific stimuli for this study, with the aim of providing a more direct means of determining the influence of imagery cues in the mediation of emotional stereotypes.

Analysis of the children's responses in the previous study also suggested that their gender attributions may be situation-specific, that is, that gender attribution may be mediated by the aspect of the situation to which the child attends. If this is so, then the salient features of the situation may override a young

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child's stereotypic beliefs about emotionality. Our earliest research with preschoolers (Birnbaum, Nosanchuk, & Croll, 1980) had found that anger was considered stereotypic of males, whereas happiness, sadness, and fear were considered stereotypic of females. A second purpose of the study was to determine the relative salience of imagery and contextual cues in the mediation of preschoolers' emotional stereotypes, that is, whether imagery cues will override the situational or contextual cues, producing changes in the gender attribution expected on the basis of the general emotional stereotype.

Fourteen male and fourteen female middle-class children (mean C.A. = 49.2 months, range = 36-63 months) from a university summer preschool program served as subjects.

Subjects were presented orally with 6 hypothetical emotional situations in story-form, 2 each for the emotions of anger, happiness, and fear. Each of the stories was augmented by one of two descriptive characteristics of the central character (i.e., imagery cues). Thus, the child in each story was described either as "with long, blond hair," a female cue, or "with short, dark hair," a male cue. These instances of imagery cues were those actually reported by children in the Chemelski and Birnbaum (1979) study. For each subject, half of the situations contained female imagery cues and half contained male imagery cues, one male and one female cue per emotion.

Subjects were instructed to listen to each situation and decide if the child in the story was a boy or a girl. Following their gender attributions, subjects were asked to supply reasons for their gender choices.

The number of preschoolers making specific gender attributions was obtained separately for male and female subjects. To test for independence of the sex of subject and attributed gender variables, separate chi-square analyses were performed on the data for each emotional situation. Since these revealed no significant differences between male and female subjects, the data were collapsed across the sex of subject variable for each situation in subsequent analyses.

Chi-square analyses revealed significant attributed gender effects in the cases of Anger-1, $\chi^2(1) = 9.14$, $p < .01$; Happiness-1, $\chi^2(1) = 7.00$, $p < .01$; Fear-1, $\chi^2(1) = 11.57$, $p < .001$; and Fear-2, $\chi^2(1) = 14.29$, $p < .001$. Female was the attributed gender in every case except Anger-1. Further analyses revealed that gender attribution was independent of imagery cue in every case ($p > .05$) except for Happiness-2, $\chi^2(1) = 17.37$, $p < .001$, where gender attribution was male in the presence of the short-hair cue but female in the presence of the long-hair cue.

Subjects' mediational responses were categorized as sex-role, emotion, action-item, personal, imagery, other, and don't know. Interrater reliabilities ranged from 98%-100%. Analysis of the use of categories by sex of subject revealed no significant sex of subject differences, all $ts < 1.00$, $p > .05$.

In most cases analysis of the mediational responses was consistent with findings from the earlier study. Once again, it appeared that the children's gender attributions were situation-specific. For example, while Anger-1 was associated with maleness, no significant differences in gender attribution were found for

Anger-2. Examination of the children's mediational responses for Anger-2 revealed that children who gave sex-role and/or emotion explanations (e.g., "He's mad.") attributed the expressed anger to males, whereas children who gave action-item explanations (e.g., "On a swing.") attributed the expressed anger to females.

A further example of situation-specific responding occurred in the case of Happiness-1, which was significantly attributed to females. Here, however, stimulus-specific responding as reflected by the use of the action-item category apparently produced the significant gender-attribution effect. That is, children who focused on the action in the story (i.e., going on a picnic) were most likely to identify the story character as female.

In the case of fear, which was clearly perceived to be a feminine emotion by the preschoolers in this as in previous studies, mediational responses fell primarily in the emotion and sex-role categories.

Mediational responses for the Happiness-2 situation revealed that preschoolers were indeed using the imagery cues of hair color and length to mediate their gender choices. The majority of those subjects who identified the character as male cited hair length (i.e., short) as the reason for their choice; the majority of those identifying the character as female also implicated hair length (i.e., long). More imagery responses occurred in Happiness-2 than in all other stories combined.

Several interesting findings emerge from this study. First, these data provide further evidence for preschoolers' stereotyping

of sex differences in emotionality. Thus, these results are consistent with those reported earlier by Birnbaum, Nosanchuk, and Croll (1980) and Chemelski and Birnbaum (1979). Second, it also confirms the finding that for preschoolers, these stereotypes may not be generalized expectations but may be modified by either contextual or imagery cues. That is, the salient feature of a particular situation may well override a young child's stereotypic beliefs about sex differences in individual aspects of emotionality. Thus, it appears that for children, as well as for adults, stereotypes may not be generalized expectations (Brigham, 1971). Third, these data suggest that while imagery cues may indeed be used to mediate emotional stereotypes, their mere presence does not guarantee their use by the child, since their salience is also dependent upon situational and contextual cues. This finding is particularly interesting, since it might have been expected on the basis of previous research, which examined the cues which children use to identify the gender of others, that hair length would be the most salient cue (cf. Thompson & Bentler, 1971). Finally, these findings suggest that hair length as an imagery cue may be most useful in situations that are ambiguous in reference to gender attribution for the preschooler, i.e., in situations in which there are no clear contextual cues. This too is consistent with previous research with adults which found that, in ambiguous situations, manipulation of gender label alone resulted in different assessments of perceived emotional state (Condry & Condry, 1976).

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Table 1

Hypothetical Emotional Situations Presented to Preschoolers

Emotion	Situation
Happiness-1	One day this child learns that the child and some friends are going on a picnic. This child is very HAPPY.
Happiness-2	This child awakes on this child's birthday to find a present on the bed. The child is very HAPPY.
Anger-1	The child is building sand castles at the beach. The tide came in and washed the castle away. The child is very ANGRY.
Anger-2	This child is playing on the playground on a swing when someone grabs the swing away. This child is very ANGRY.
Fear-1	This child is playing behind a tree during a game of hide-and-seek when the child steps into a hole and can't get out. The child is very SCARED.
Fear-2	The child is taking its afternoon nap. Suddenly there is a noise underneath the bed. The child is very SCARED.

Table 2

Definitions and Examples of Mediational Categories

Sex Role
Makes reference to boys or girls in general concerning the emotion mentioned in a particular story and/or non-emotional contextual elements of a particular story.

Ex.
"Girls are very, very scared."
"Boys get real mad."

Emotion
Makes reference to the emotional component of the story.

Ex.
"Must be a girl 'cause she is scared."
"He's mad."

Action-Item
Makes reference to the non-emotional contextual component of the story.

Ex.
"He was building."
"On a picnic."

Personal
Makes reference to child, family, friends, or possessions.

Ex.
"I get angry."
"My toy not broke."

Imagery
Makes reference to elements not originally included in a particular story but relevant to the story line or gender of the story character reported by the child.

Ex.
"Got short hair."
"She has blond hair."

Other
Any non-categorical response except "don't know."

Ex.
"I know everything."
"It just is."

Don't Know
Subject must say "don't know."